



377 Research Parkway
Meriden, CT 06450-7160
203-238-1297

TESTIMONY RE: Raised Bill No. 929 AN ACT CONCERNING THE
QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS OF SCHOOL NURSES

Education Committee
February 23, 2011

Good Afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and Members of the Education Committee.

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Nurses' Association (CNA), the professional organization for registered nurses in Connecticut. I am, Mary Jane Williams, PhD., RN current chairperson of its Government Relations Committee and professor emeritus from Central Connecticut State University. I have practiced nursing for over 45 years and have been educating nurses in Connecticut for 35 years. I am providing testimony in support of Raised Bill 929, AN ACT CONCERNING THE QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS OF SCHOOL NURSES.

The nursing profession's educational history is rich with opportunities for career advancement. Since the introduction of associate degree programs in the 1950s, thousands of nurses have entered the nursing profession through the community college system. It is noted that 63% of licensed RNs in the state of Connecticut graduate from Associate Degree Nursing Programs. Associate degree programs prepare graduate nurses to sit for the NCLEX-RN (national licensing exam) and to begin functioning competently as novice nurses. Associate Degree programs were originally conceptualized to prepare the technical nurse.

Bachelor's degree programs provide additional emphasis on key areas of nursing theory and the use of evidence-based data in nursing practice. BSN students are exposed to settings and areas of practice in acute care, public health, home care, and other outpatient settings. The BSN curriculum provides students with assessment, research, leadership and critical thinking skills that enable them to practice more independently based on the research evidence and their experience.

The increasing complexity of technology, medications and treatments, and chronic health conditions (in all age groups) underscores the need for nurses to continue their education. The changing environment and consumer expectations emphasize the need to reevaluate nursing education. A strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences strengthens the analytical and critical thinking skills needed for safe, culturally competent care. These skills, which are further developed through BSN programs, better prepare RNs to seek improvements that address unsafe practice and other challenges in all healthcare delivery systems. With the changing student populations in our communities and schools it is essential that we provide the impetus for baccalaureate education. The baccalaureate degree will enhance the practice of the school nurse who is the often the first point of access to health care via the school system.

In a report to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice urged that two thirds of the basic nurse workforce hold bachelors or higher degrees in nursing by 2010. The National Association of School Nurses states "The school nurse has a crucial role in the seamless provision of comprehensive health services to children and youth. Increasing numbers of students enter schools with chronic health conditions that require management during the school day. The school nurse is a team member providing preventive services, early identification of problems, interventions, and referrals to foster health and educational success. To optimally care for children, preparations, ongoing education of school nurses are important factors for success.

The National Association of School Nurses further defines school nursing as:

A specialized practice of professional nursing that advances the well-being, academic success, and lifelong achievement of students. To that end, school nurses facilitate positive student responses to normal development; promote health and safety; intervene with actual and potential health problems; provide case management services; and actively collaborate with others to build student and family capacity for adaptation, self-management, self-advocacy, and learning (www.NSNA.org).

In order to meet the standards and scope of practice defined by the national organization for school nurses it is essential that Connecticut support the changes to the education regulations. It is recommended by NSNA that we require three years of current experience in nursing in addition to a BSN in order to assure that the nurse is qualified to sit for the National Certification Exam. It is also recommended that we use only Registered Nurses in School Nursing. We as leaders in nursing and policy must make difficult decisions in order to provide safe, quality care in all settings for the public that we serve.

I urge you to support with recommended modifications Raised Bill 929.

Thank you,

Mary Jane M. Williams